

Parks Comprehensive Plan Task Force

Meeting Summary February 21, 2007

Task Force members present: Erick Goodlow, Steve Gordon (chair), Maggie Lindorfer, , Pete Regnier, Kathy Schubert, Victor Vang, Carrie Wasley (vice chair), Jenny Winkelman

Members absent: R.D. Brown (excused), Chuck Evens (excused), John O'Connell (excused), Brian Pelc (excused)

Staff: Bob Bierscheid, Vince Gillespie, Kathy Korum, Rich Lallier, Jess Rosenfeld, Ruth Schumi, Eric Thompson, Jason Wirka

Panelists: Marnie Wells, Linda Flynn, Julianne Seiber, Alex Stokman, Liz Capiello

Panel Discussion on Users and Uses of Parks

Marnie Wells, Second Shift Coordinator

Wells described Mayor Coleman's Second Shift Initiative. The emphasis is on closing the academic achievement gap through formally and informally programming out of school time. Parks and recreation are an important part of the Second Shift.

Comp Plan Implications:

Current Parks Plan policies support the ideas behind the Second Shift initiative, but language could be added about kids' out-of-school time and the importance of integrating parks and school activities.

Linda Flynn, Mobile Recreation and Go Team

Flynn described Parks' Mobile Recreation and Go Team programs. Mobile recreation is an outreach program that brings recreation activities to the community, especially to special events. It needs better marketing, but it is also an opportunity to market parks and recreation services. The Go Team is a way for Parks to provide staff to recreation centers for specialized leadership in places where there are more kids than staff can handle or to engage a group of kids that aren't engaged. The Go Team provides more flexible solutions to staffing issues.

Comp Plan Implications:

Support for Go Team and Mobile Recreation programs should be expressed in the comp plan as effective ways to meet staffing challenges and to bring recreation where it's needed.

Julianne Seiber, Saint Paul/Ramsey County Public Health

Seiber talked about some of the initiatives going on to try to reincorporate active living into people's lives (Steps to a Healthier Saint Paul, Get Fit Twin Cities, and Active Living Ramsey County!). In order to achieve the major behavioral changes that are

necessary, partnerships between public health, parks, etc., are crucial. This is becoming one of the Parks division's top priorities, but active living will be considered for all of the Comprehensive Plan chapter updates.

Comp Plan Implications:

Active living principles should be incorporated in the update of the Comprehensive Plan.

Alex Stokman, Chair of Bicycle Advisory Board (BAB)

The BAB represents all bikers, but is primarily concerned with recreational and transportation riders. Saint Paul does a good job of meeting needs of recreational riders but isn't as good at serving transportation riders. There are significant gaps in trail connections and in maintenance of trails. Signage and wayfinding should be improved, especially for trail connections. Recreation centers should be more accessible to bike riders, through on- or off-street trail connections and with secure, convenient parking for bikes. Secured bike parking should also be considered for big city events. Just as housing construction projects can offset parking requirements if they have bike parking, recreation centers should consider providing bike parking in lieu of car parking.

Comp Plan Implications:

Many of the recommendations on bikes and trails should be in both the Parks Plan and the Transportation Plan. The plans should acknowledge kids as "commuters" to school, after-school activities, etc., and emphasize the importance of safe routes to school, recreation centers, and parks. Secure bike parking at special events should be pursued, possibly as a concession instead of an amenity.

Liz Capiello, Dog Parks

Saint Paul only has one off-leash dog area (at Arlington-Arkwright), and it needs more. Dogs are becoming a more important part of peoples' lives, and are creating an unmet need in the park system. The current facility is overused. Three to four additional fully or partially fenced off-leash areas would provide good service. Smaller sites (like disused tennis courts) could be considered as potential off-leash areas for smaller dogs.

Comp Plan Implications:

While dog parks are not universally desired or appropriate for all locations, the Parks Plan should support pursuing opportunities to develop new off-leash areas where environmentally appropriate and without compromising the quality of parks for people. New dog parks could be established on land already owned by the city but not part of the current parks system. Any new dog parks should be accompanied by new permitting procedures and permit enforcement.

Bob Bierscheid gave the task force a snapshot assessment of where the parks system is headed and where it needs improvement.

- Saint Paul's core sport communities are well served, but the system hasn't evolved enough to meet all of the needs of a changing population.
- As Saint Paul's land uses change, the city needs to institutionalize a process to continue to expand the park system. This process needs to consider the whole system in a standardized way to see what areas and functions are well served.
- The zoo and Conservatory are not as physically accessible as they should be.
- Saint Paul does adaptive recreation well, but the program is undercapitalized.
- Senior programming is not keeping up with a growing (and more active) senior population.
- There is a need for better trends analysis to anticipate and understand emergent citizen needs.
- As Minnesota winters warm up, the city does not have enough resources to support extensive winter activities.
- Parks need better marketing and more user education.
- Programming should be consistent throughout the system, regardless of geography.
- Activities that were once popular enough to draw people to all available facilities, like golf, are becoming less popular. These activities/facilities may now require more formal programming in order to continue to attract people.
- Environmental stewardship is a critical part of Parks' mission, but its implementation is under funded.
- Security is a big concern. Enforcement of current policies should be increased, but new models for security should also be considered (where parks security officers interact in positive ways with the community, e.g. by teaching classes).
- Signage and wayfinding on trails should be upgraded.
- Saint Paul's aquatic program is good, but needs improvement.
- Saint Paul's picnic facilities are good, but need improvement.
- The expansion of partnerships should be pursued.
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NEXT MEETING: March 21, 4 – 7 p.m., at the Como Visitor Center.